

A chore for casino panel

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Stephen P. Crosby, the former Swift administration official named by Governor Patrick to head the newly formed Massachusetts Gaming Commission, has signed on to one of the most difficult jobs in the state. He will chair the five-member panel charged with establishing the rules for casino gambling in the state and choose the sites for casinos and a slot machine parlor, and more importantly, as chairman it will be largely up to him to assure that this process is not marred by corruption, as it was in recent years in Pennsylvania. In a state as prone to political corruption as is Massachusetts, Mr. Crosby plainly has his work cut out for him.

Mr. Crosby has a reputation for integrity and having served in both Republican and Democratic administrations he is not known as a political partisan. His most controversial moment in the public eye came when he served as budget director and chief of state for acting Governor Jane Swift and was involved in her ill-fated effort to remove two dissidents from the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority.

In recent years, Mr. Crosby has spoken out against casino gambling in the state, and even though he came to accept it as inevitable, his skepticism suggests he will be skeptical of the pie-in-the-sky financial predictions of the casino interests as they compete to be selected to build casinos in the state. The bidders for the Western Massachusetts casino so far are looking to build in Palmer and the Springfield area.

Earlier this year, a grand jury found that the five-year process of choosing casinos in Pennsylvania was riddled with cronyism, patronage and backroom deals, and a special report largely blamed this on the Pennsylvania Gaming Commission for protecting the interests of the gambling industry, not the state's taxpayers. That the commission's Massachusetts counterpart also has an industry approved title (gaming rather than the more accurate gambling) is worrisome, and Mr. Crosby and the four other members to be named will be charged with assuring that Massachusetts does not succumb to the same forces of greed and corruption that Pennsylvania opened the door to. Those forces are formidable and used to having their way.